

04-233

Alliance for Better Campaigns



October 24, 2003

Mr. Royce Sherlock
Federal Communications Commission, Localism Task Force
455 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Sherlock:

Enclosed for your information is a copy of "All Politics Is Local, But You Wouldn't Know it by Watching Local TV: Less Than One Half of One Percent of Programming is Local Public Affairs."

The study, conducted by the Alliance for Better Campaigns, examined the programming schedules of 45 local television stations in the six cities (seven media markets) where the Federal Communications Commission's Localism Task Force is holding town hall hearings. The report found that of the more than 7,500 hours analyzed, just 13 hours – less than one half of one percent – were devoted to local public affairs shows.

Please feel free to contact the Alliance if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Meredith McGehee
President and Executive Director



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ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL, BUT YOU WOULDN'T KNOW IT BY WATCHING LOCAL TV:

Less Than One Half of One Percent of Programming is Local Public Affairs

In exchange for free licenses to operate on the publicly-owned airwaves, broadcasters are legally obliged to serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity." Airing local public affairs programming is an important part of broadcasters' public interest obligations.

Broadcasters have an explicit responsibility to serve the local communities to which they are licensed, as established by the Communications Act of 1934. The United States Court of Appeals upheld the localism provision in a 1956 ruling, declaring "the prime factor" in broadcast programming regulation "is the presentation of programs of local interest and importance." And the 1960 Program Policy Statement issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stated that the "principal ingredient" of the public interest standard "consists of a diligent, positive and continuing effort by the licensee to discover and fulfill the tastes, needs and desires of his service area."

"When people choose to become licensed broadcasters, they understand that public service and a regulated environment come with that privilege. As Newton Minow [reminded] stockholders, 'an investment in broadcasting is buying a share in public responsibility.' ...[B]roadcasters must serve the public interest and meet the local needs of the community."

- FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, July 2003

Preserving localism has been the rationale for other regulatory protections that local broadcasters have received. For example, in 1992, Congress passed "must-carry" legislation that requires cable operators to transmit local broadcast channels on their systems. "A primary objective and benefit of our Nation's system of regulation of television broadcasting is the local origination of programming. There is a substantial governmental interest in ensuring its continuation," Congress stated.

In preparation for the six hearings on localism being convened by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Alliance for Better Campaigns examined programming on 45 local television stations for the week of October 5 through October 11, 2003 and found there is a near black out of local public affairs. Of the 7,560 hours of programming analyzed, less than one half of one percent - 13 hours - were devoted to local public affairs shows. Even if locally produced newsmagazine-type shows (which
















Local public affairs programs are devoted to local issues of governance or civic affairs. The programs typically consist of interviews with local newsmakers about issues of importance to the community. National public affairs programs (such as *Meet the Press*) accounted for 57 hours; however, there is rarely a local component to such shows.


Broadcasters often claim that local public affairs programming is contained in their local news shows; and indeed, some stations embed discussions about community issues within their news programming. For example, WRC-TV in Washington DC regularly airs a "ViewPoint" segment during its early morning news on Sundays. But nine stations – one fifth of the Alliance's study sample – do not air any local news at all.

This study did not include any content analysis to determine the amount of public affairs that aired during local news programming on the week of October 5, 2003. However, a study of local news in 17 markets conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism in 2002 found that just nine percent of local news stories focused on politics at any level (the PEJ study did not differentiate between national and local political stories).

The small amount of public affairs programming that is broadcast rarely airs between 6pm and midnight, when viewership is highest. On the 45 stations analyzed, just two and a half hours of local public affairs programming aired in or near prime time during the study time period. Two of those hours occurred on Saturday, October 11 when WGME-TV, a CBS affiliate in Portland, Maine, aired a prime time special and debate on a referendum question about whether to allow resort casinos in Maine. While WGME-TV should be commended for helping their viewers sort through the complex set of issues surrounding legalized gambling, we also note that debates about public policy issues are not a regular part of WGME-TV's typical Saturday night lineup.

The table below shows that most local public affairs programming – eight of the 13 total hours – airs on weekend mornings.

	Midnight – 8am	8am – Noon	Noon-6pm	6pm-Midnight
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday	 			 
Sunday	  	  	 	

 = One Hour of Local Public Affairs Programming

Each half-hour of programming was coded by station, market, network affiliation, program name, time aired, and category. Categories included:

- **Celebrity News** – Includes all celebrity-focused shows (e.g. *Access Hollywood*).
- **Comedy** – Includes sitcoms (e.g. *Everybody Loves Raymond*), adult-targeted animation (e.g. *The Simpsons*), and sketch shows (e.g. *Saturday Night Live*).
- **Drama** – All drama programs (e.g. *The West Wing*), science fiction (e.g. *Star Trek*), movies and soap operas (e.g. *General Hospital*).
- **Educational** – Includes all children's programming (e.g. *Blue's Clues*; *Scooby Doo*), documentaries, and nature shows (e.g. *Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures*).
- **Local News** – Locally produced newscasts.
- **Local Public Affairs** – Locally produced public affairs programs and newsmagazines.
- **National News** – Nationally produced newscasts.
- **National Public Affairs** – Nationally produced public affairs programs (e.g. *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*) and newsmagazines (e.g. *Dateline*).
- **Other** – Includes home & garden (e.g. *Martha Stewart Living*), variety or musical (*Showtime at the Apollo*), travel, fashion, etc. Also includes hours when stations are signed off the air.
- **Paid Programming** – Includes all home shopping and 30-minute (or longer) infomercials.
- **Reality** – Includes game shows (e.g. *Wheel of Fortune*; *Survivor*), dating shows (e.g. *Blind Date*) and courtroom shows (e.g. *Judge Judy*).
- **Religious** – Includes all religious, spiritual or worship programs.
- **Sports** – Includes football, auto racing, wrestling, baseball, et cetera.
- **Talk shows** – Includes both daytime (e.g. *Oprah Winfrey*) and late night (e.g. *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*) talk.

This study utilized the methodology originally developed by the Benton Foundation and the Media Access Project for their April 1998 study called "What's Local about Local Broadcasting?"

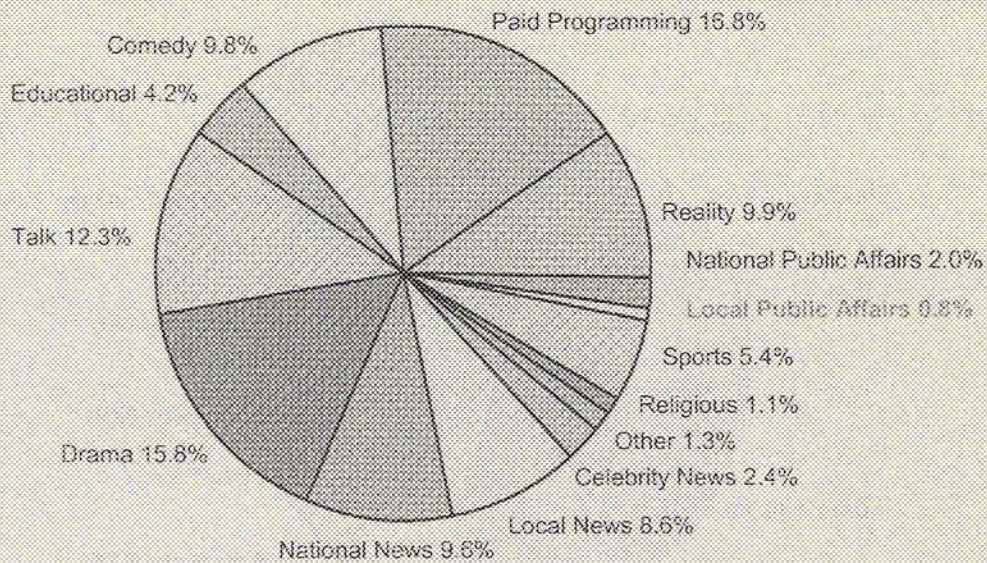
PORTLAND, MAINE

Market Rank 74

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
WCSH	NBC	Gannett Company Incorporated
WGME-TV	CBS	Sinclair Broadcast Group
WMTW-TV	ABC	WMTW Broadcast Group LLC
WPME	UPN	KB Prime Media LLC
WPXT	WB	Pegasus Communications Corporation

Programming in Portland:

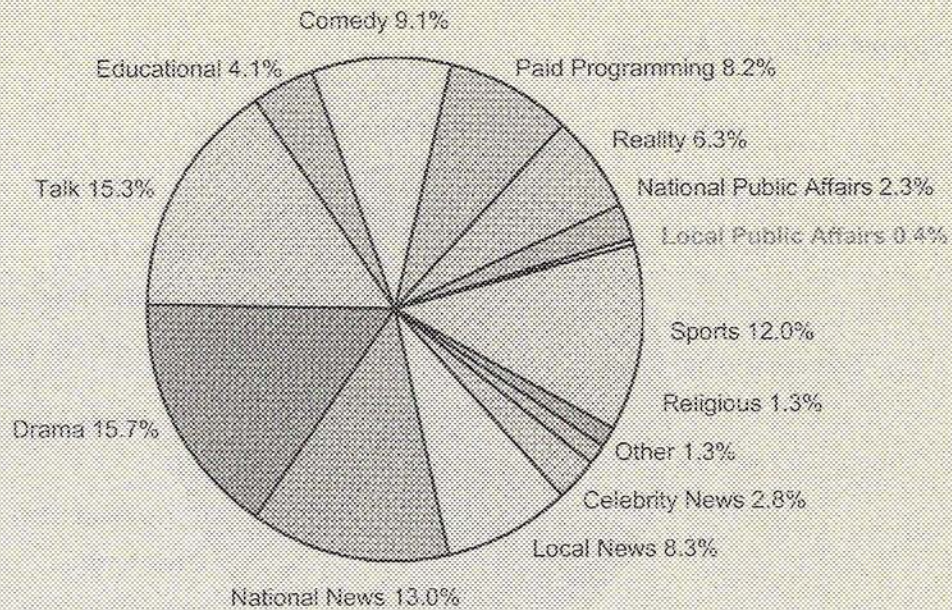


SALINAS, CALIFORNIA
Market Rank 121

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
KCBA	Fox	Clear Channel Television
KION-TV	CBS	Clear Channel Television
KSBW	NBC	Hearst-Argyle

Programming in Salinas:



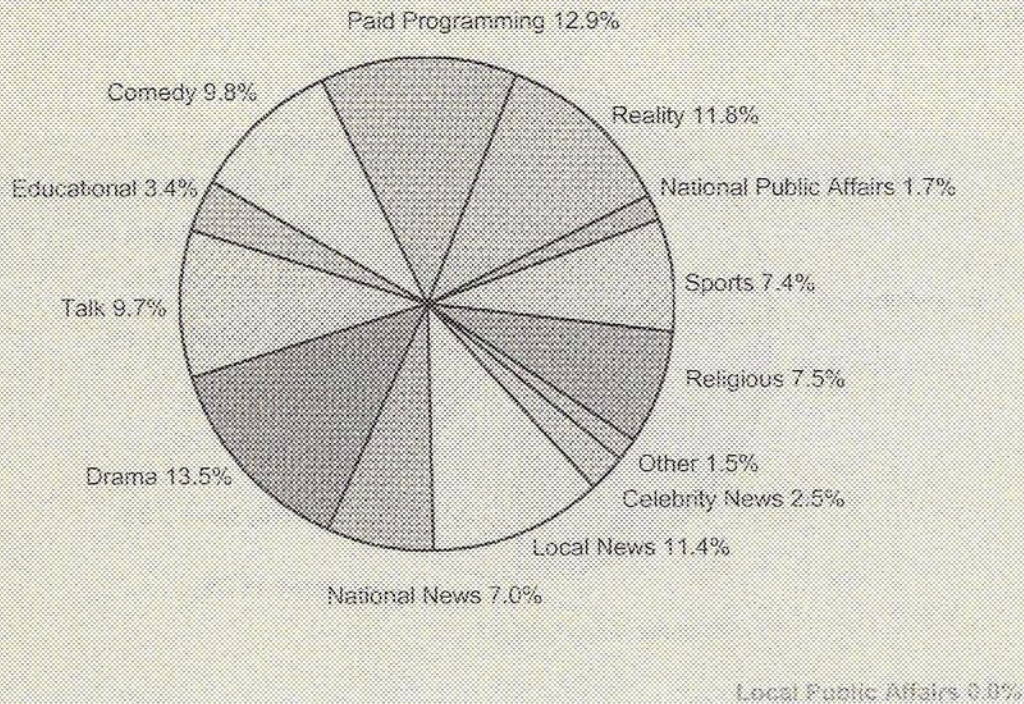
WASHINGTON, DC

Market Rank 8

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
WBDC	WB	Tribune Broadcasting Company
WDCA	UPN	Fox Television Stations
WJLA-TV	ABC	Allbritton Communications Company
WPXW	PAX	Paxson Communications Corporation
WRC-TV	NBC	NBC/GE
WTTG	Fox	Fox Television Stations
WUSA	CBS	Gannett Company Incorporated

Programming in Washington, DC:



About the Alliance for Better Campaigns

The Alliance for Better Campaigns is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) public interest group that seeks to improve elections by promoting campaigns in which the most useful information reaches the greatest number of citizens in the most engaging ways.

The Alliance works towards reforms that reduce the cost and increase the flow of political communication; that open up the political process to more competition; and that facilitate and encourage voter participation. The publicly-owned airwaves can be used to revitalize our democracy by putting meaning back into broadcasters' statutory obligation to serve the public interest and their communities.

The Alliance's honorary co-chairs are former Presidents **Jimmy Carter** and **Gerald Ford** and legendary anchorman **Walter Cronkite**.

The Alliance is leading the *Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign* to educate activists and the public at large about proposals that would ensure that broadcasters provide voters with better information about candidates and issues during election time, and would allow candidates who raise small-dollar contributions to earn broadcast ad time.

Alliance for Better Campaigns

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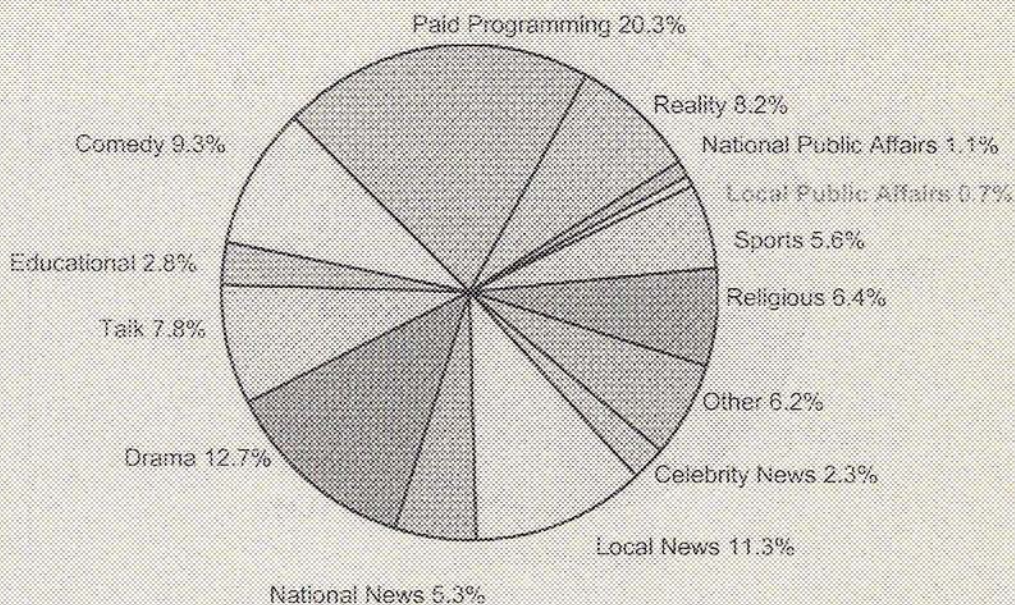
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Market Rank 5

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
KBHK-TV	UPN	CBS Television
KBWB	WB	Granite Broadcasting Corporation
KGO-TV	ABC	ABC/Disney
KICU-TV	Independent	Cox Broadcasting
KKPX	PAX	Paxson Communications Corporation
KNTV	NBC	NBC/GE
KPIX-TV	CBS	CBS/Viacom
KRON-TV	Independent	Young Broadcasting
KTSF	Independent	Lincoln Broadcasting
KTVU	Fox	Cox Broadcasting

Programming in San Francisco:



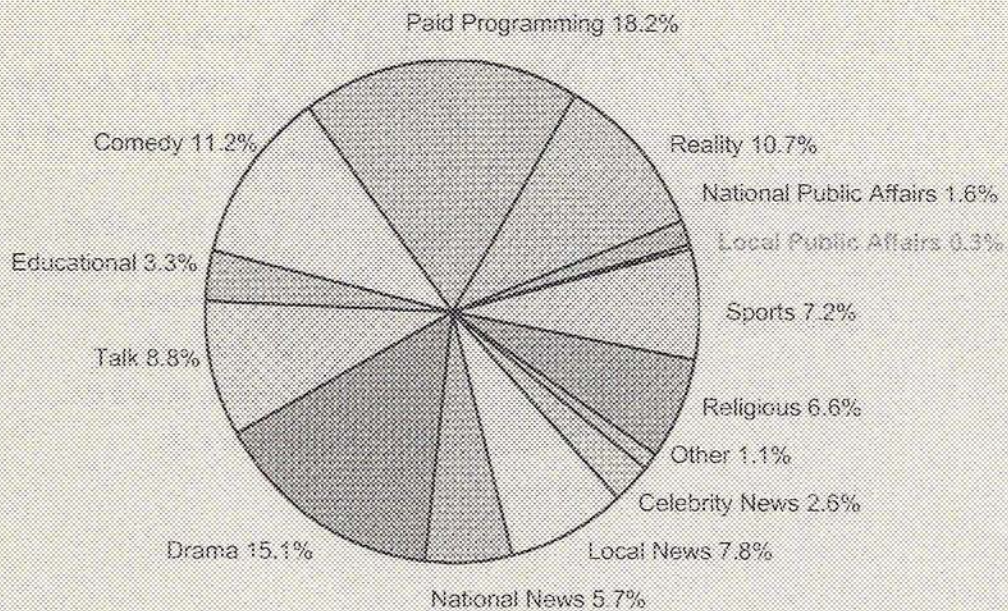
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Market Rank 37

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
KABB	Fox	Sinclair Broadcast Group
KBEJ	UPN	Corridor Television LLP
KENS-TV	CBS	Belo Corporation
KPXL	PAX	Paxon Communications Corporation
KRRT	WB	Sinclair Broadcast Group
KSAT-TV	ABC	Post-Newsweek Stations
WOAI-TV	NBC	Clear Channel Television

Programming in San Antonio:

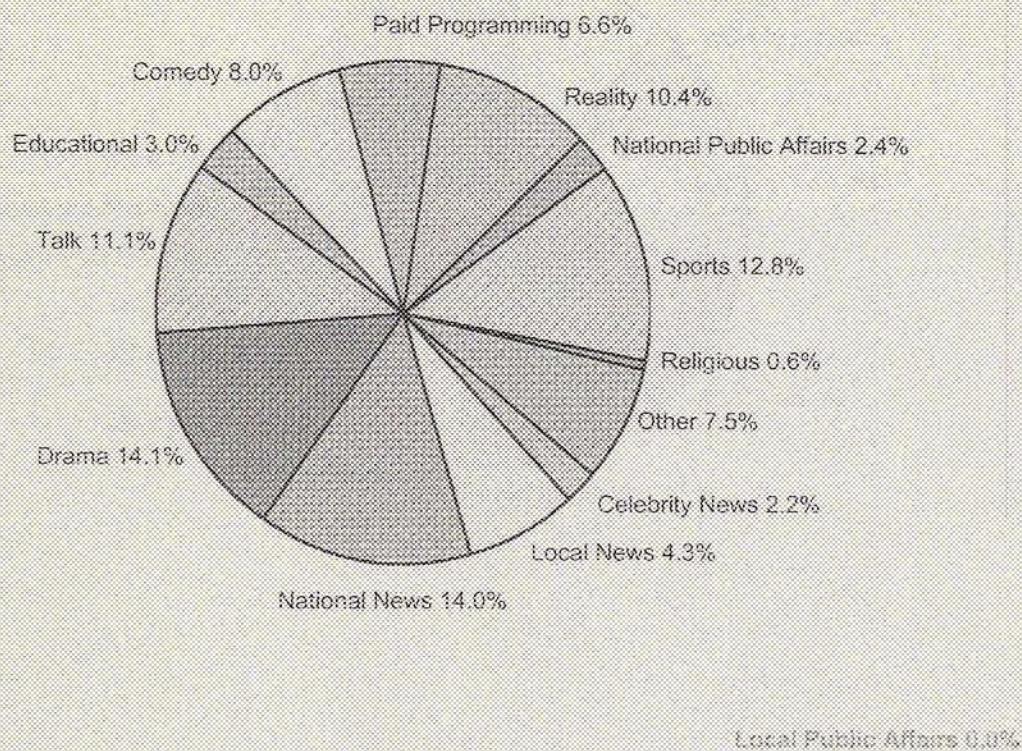


RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA
Market Rank 174

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
KCLO-TV	CBS	Young Broadcasting
KEVN-TV	Fox	Mission TV LLC
KHSD-TV	ABC	Duhamel Broadcasting Enterprises
KIVV	Fox	Mission TV LLC
KNBN	NBC	Rapid Broadcasting Corporation
KOTA-TV	ABC	Duhamel Broadcasting Enterprises

Programming in Rapid City:



Appendix -- Market Specific Findings

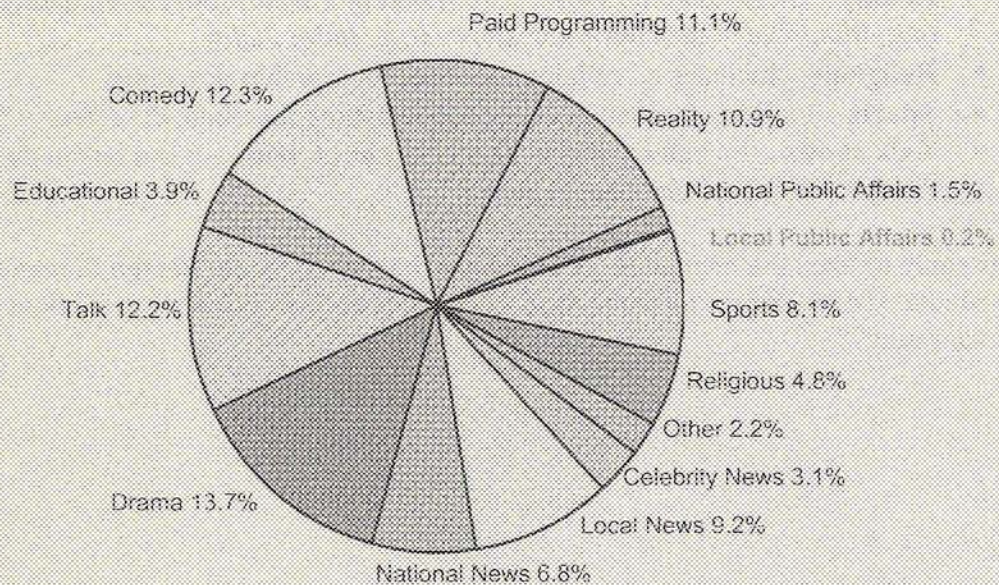
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Market Rank 28

Stations included in the study:

Station	Network Affiliation	Owner
WAXN-TV	Independent	Cox Broadcasting
WBTV	CBS	Jefferson-Pilot Communications Company
WCCB	Fox	Bahakel Communications
WCNC-TV	NBC	Belo Corporation
WJZY	UPN	Capitol Broadcasting Company
WSOC-TV	ABC	Cox Broadcasting
WWWB	WB	Capitol Broadcasting Company

Programming in Charlotte:



Methodology

The Alliance for Better Campaigns examined local television programming in the six cities (seven media markets) where the Federal Communications Commission's Localism Task Force will be holding public hearings in 2003-2004 to solicit input from consumers, industry analysts, civic organizations and others regarding broadcast localism. The markets included in this sample represent geographic diversity, as well as a mix of large and small media markets.

The Alliance collected the programming schedules for 45 local commercial television stations for the week of Sunday, October 5 through Saturday, October 11, 2003. The schedules were gathered from Zap2It.com, a website which provides news and information about television and movies. In most cases, the schedules provided by Zap2It.com were cross-checked against programming schedules and descriptions available on the stations' own websites.

The stations included in the Alliance's study include:

In Charlotte, North Carolina: WAXN-TV; WBTV; WCCB; WCNC-TV; WJZY; WSOC-TV and WWWB.

In Portland, Maine: WCSH; WGME-TV; WMTW-TV; WPME; and WPXT.

In Rapid City, South Dakota: KCLO-TV; KEVN-TV; KHSD-TV; KIVV; KNBN; and KOTA-TV.

In Salinas, California: KCBA; KION-TV; and KSBW.

In San Antonio, Texas: KABB; KBEJ; KENS-TV; KPXL; KRRT; KSAT-TV; and WOAI-TV.

In San Francisco, California: KBHK-TV; KBWB; KGO-TV; KICU-TV; KKPX; KNTV; KPIX-TV; KRON-TV; KTSF; and KTVU.

In Washington, DC: WBDC; WDCA; WJLA-TV; WPXW; WRC-TV; WTTG; and WUSA.

Additional information about each station's ownership and network affiliation is available in the appendix.

tend to focus on local arts and entertainment rather than politics and governance) are included, the total still remains less than half of one percent: 27 hours, or 0.4 percent.

The Alliance study reviewed more than 7,500 hours of programming and placed them into 14 categories. Local public affairs programming ranked dead last.

Category of Programming*	# Hours	Percentage
Paid Programming	1,085.5	14.4%
Drama	1,065.0	14.1%
Talk Shows	783.0	10.4%
Comedy	757.0	10.0%
Reality	749.5	9.9%
Local News	708.5	9.4%
National News	608.0	8.0%
Sports	595.0	7.9%
Religious	351.0	4.6%
Educational	257.5	3.4%
Other (e.g. travel, fashion)	254.5	3.4%
Celebrity News	191.5	2.5%
National Public Affairs	127.0	1.7%
Regular Public Affairs	57.0	0.8%
Newsmagazine-type Shows	70.0	0.9%
Local Public Affairs	27.0	0.4%
Regular Public Affairs	13.0	0.2%
Newsmagazine-type Shows	14.0	0.2%

*See methodology for category definitions.

In fact, many sub-categories ranked ahead of local public affairs programming:

Sub-category	Hours	Comparison
Courtroom Shows (e.g. <i>Judge Judy</i> , <i>Texas Justice</i>)	254.0	20 times as many Courtroom Shows as Local Public Affairs
Dating Shows (e.g. <i>Blind Date</i> , <i>5th Wheel</i>)	112.0	9 times as many Dating Shows as Local Public Affairs
Soap Operas	296.5	23 times as many Soap Operas as Local Public Affairs
Adult-targeted Animated Shows (e.g. <i>King of the Hill</i> , <i>The Simpsons</i>)	50.0	4 times as many Cartoons for Adults as Local Public Affairs
Late night talk shows (e.g. <i>David Letterman</i> , <i>Jay Leno</i>)	245.5	19 times as many Late Night Talk Shows as Local Public Affairs
NFL Football	85.0	7 times as many Pro Football Games as Local Public Affairs
<i>Seinfeld</i> Reruns	36.5	3 times as many <i>Seinfeld</i> reruns as Local Public Affairs

